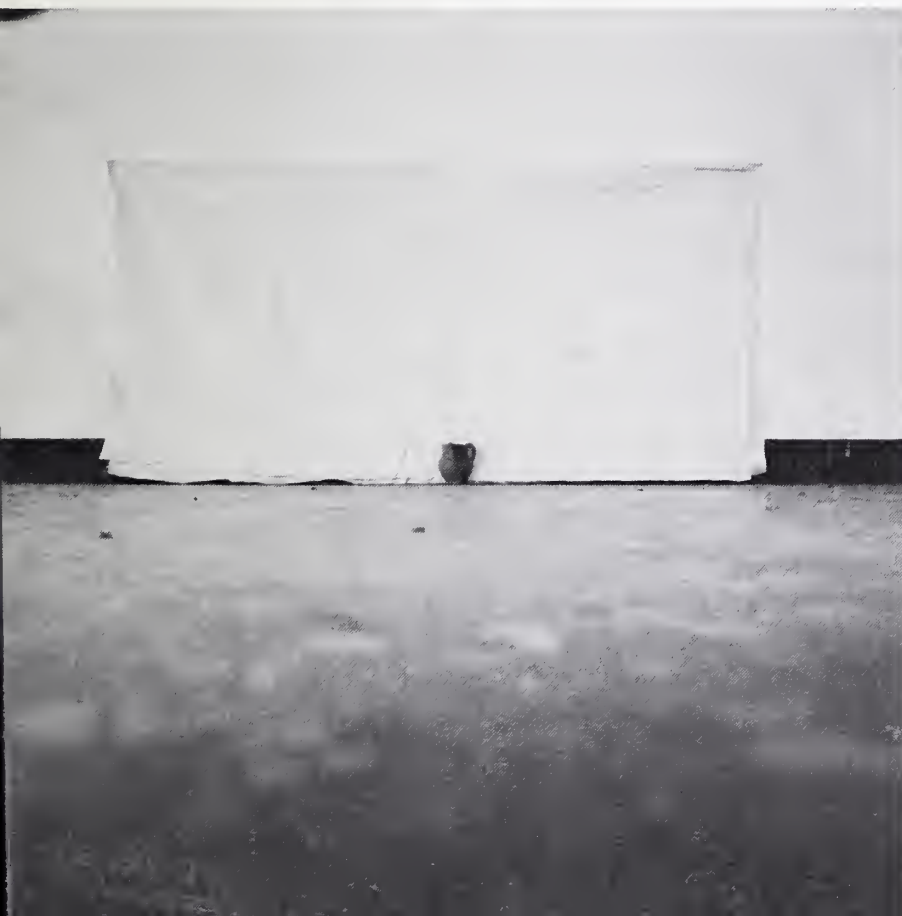


Italo Scanga



In the presence of Italo Scanga's work one is a guest, not an observer. No matter what the location, his sculpture makes the scale of an environment human, intimate and welcoming. When I first visited his home in Philadelphia, I had difficulty distinguishing Scanga's work from his tools, household furniture, unused materials, stored utensils, toys and gardening implements. It was apparent that his sculpture, in the most immediate sense, could not be separated from the activities and objects of his life.

Scanga was born in Calabria. The deeply religious and ritualized aspects of southern Italian life, the brooding mysticism and passionate intensity of his homeland, its combined rusticism and spirituality made a lasting impression on him and his art. In Italy he worked as a cabinetmaker's apprentice and studied sculpture with a man who carved statues of the saints. When he first came to live in the United States in 1947, at the age of 15, his family settled in a Pennsylvania coal-mining town. He was a janitor, a shoe-shine boy and a miner while completing his education, but he has made sculpture as long as he can remember.

The events of Scanga's life are integral to the fabric of his art. His exhibition catalogues are designed by friends and contain pictures of them, of himself and his family, old etchings of the saints, photographs of workers, the town where he was born, pieces he has made, things he likes and comments about his work by other artists, written with wit, affection and respect. ("Italo grows/Squashes that imitate sculptures/Sculptures and friends that are/What Italo knows," wrote one. "In Italo, and in his work, there is much to see and much that is easily missed. Take time for both," wrote another.) Scanga is also a brilliant and influential teacher. Many former students are now well-known artists; his pupils are his friends and assistants, and his

exhibitions are done with their help. His home and family are similarly integral to his work. He has a wonderful collection of *art nouveau* objects which seem to resemble his sculpture, rather than vice-versa; when he cooks a dinner for family and friends, it becomes a communal feast; a piece done last year at 93 Grand Street was the re-creation of an event which took place every year in Calabria, when the wine made during the previous season was opened and tasted.

More important than the specific events of his life are the feelings and memories Scanga incorporates into every object he makes. The baskets of dried beans, nuts, corn, barley or figs that appear often in the pieces are for him "like gifts. In Italy," he says, "we would take these things to the Church as offerings." He may use a piece of linen that his sister wove for her dowry, or tools (a ladder, a scythe, a pitchfork) that were made to fit the human body and be used by it. Objects that are frozen in time and space—knives, hatchets, a butcher block which Scanga refers to as "the geometry of death"—are divorced from human functions and left to reveal their own nature. They are, he says, like the tools and machines in the background of Breughel's *Unfaithful Shepherd*—the eloquent artifacts of human love and labor.

In all of his work one finds the contradictions which characterize Scanga's life and personality. Objects which have their own energy are subjected by the artist to the strictest spatial discipline, so that each object operates as a rigorous formal element as well as an associative device. His pieces consequently are both intense and peaceful, brutal and compassionate, medieval and contemporary. "I always work with positive and negative, rationality and irrationality, day and night, very basic things," he says.

The theme of the present show is "saints, tools, romances." As always, it is organized without preconceived ideas and in many modes. He places, carves, pours, attaches, builds and destroys. Everything is made by hand, and everything is small. There is no technology here, no surface color or patina, no "skin" concealing the materials of which an object is made. The piece was prompted in part by a phrase of Verlaine's which Scanga recalls, having to do with "the malice of *things*;" it is dedicated to St. Lucy, the protector of the eyes. Always, social and esthetic implications coexist. "In my work," he says, "aspects of life, senility, anxiety, fascism, religion, are translated into physical statements." Scanga brings together the things he knows best to share with us. His intention is to "bring back things to people, to create a kind of country feeling, to make the viewer feel good. . . ."

He recently returned from several months of work and travel in Europe. "When I was in Germany," he said, "I went to visit Goethe's house; I was looking for peace and tranquility, but couldn't find it. I go all over Europe searching for Arcadia, a search for the place that you imagine in your mind." It is just this world—impossible to find in our own civilization—that Scanga has created for himself here and welcomes us into.

Marcia Tucker
Associate Curator

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Italo Scanga

1. Born in Lago (Calabria) Italy, 1932. Lived in Pennsylvania from 1947 to 1950. Studied at the Society of Arts and Crafts, Detroit, Mich. from 1951 to 1953. Served with the United States Army in Austria, 1953-55. Received B.A. and M.A. in Sculpture, Michigan State University in 1961.

Taught:

University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1961-64.
Brown University, Summers 1964 and 1966.
Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, 1964-1966.
Penn State University, 1966-67.
Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, Associate Professor of Sculpture, 1967-
University of Rhode Island, Summers 1969, 1971.
Tyler School of Art, Rome, Summer 1972.

Awards:

48th Annual Wisconsin Painters and Sculptors Show, Milwaukee Art Center, 1962.
Howard Foundation Grant from Brown University, 1970.
Cassandra Grant from Chicago, 1972.

2. EXHIBITIONS

One-Man Shows:

Milwaukee Art Center, Wisconsin, April 1964.
Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.
Henri Gallery, Washington, D.C., 1971.
93 Grand Street, New York, N.Y., 1971.
University of Rochester, N.Y., 1971.
Chapman-Kelley Gallery, Dallas, Texas, 1970.
Tyler School of Art, Rome, 1972.

Exhibitions:

Detroit Institute of Art, Mich., 1957.
First International Festival of Contemporary Art, Pittsburgh, Pa., 1959.



Valparaiso University, Ind., 1959.
Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1961.
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minn., 1962
Biennial, 1964 Biennial.
Wright Art Center, Beloit, Wis., 1962.
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design,
Providence, R.I., 1964, 1965, 1966.
Multiplicity Show, Institute of Contemporary
Art, Boston, Mass., 1966.
The Pennsylvania State University, Hetzel
Union Gallery, group show, 1966.
Whitney Museum of American Art Sculpture
Annual, New York, N.Y., 1970.
112 Green Street, New York, N.Y., 1971.
Museum of Art, Vassar, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.,
"26 by 26," 1971.
Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y.,
"Project Pier 18" and Penthouse Gallery,
1971.
University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1971.
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Ill.,
1971.
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.,
1971.
Everson Museum, Syracuse, N.Y., 1972.
Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts,
Philadelphia, Pa., 1972.

November 30, 1972-January 2, 1973

Whitney Museum of American Art

945 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10021
Telephone (212) 249-4100

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Tuesday 11-10

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